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YVETTE GUILBERT IN "GUIBOUR"

(UN MIRACLE DE NOTRE DAME: COMMENT ELLE GARDE UNE FEMME D'ESTRE ARSE)

BY ANNIE DOUGLAS SEVERANCE

THE production at The Neighborhood Playhouse this season of "Guibour," a Miracle Play of the fourteenth century, with Madame Yvette Guilbert in the title rôle, marked the first appearance of this artist in lyric and dramatic interpretation as an actress on the English-speaking stage. She long ago found a perfect medium in the early romantic French songs for the expression of her unique personality and genius, and there is no one in the field of drama so well fitted, both in knowledge and artistry, to express the great poetic feeling of France in the Middle Ages as shown in the Mystery Plays of that time.

With one or two minor exceptions, "Guibour" is the first Miracle Play to be given in New York since "Everyman." In presenting it Madame Guilbert's thought is to suggest an ideal blossoming of the soul of the world into the noble, pure, and charming qualities which at the end of the war should attend a spiritual Renaissance. We have been assured that hate makes war. Then let us slay hate. If peace is to endure upon the earth, man must be born anew, and with regenerate heart live a life of forbearance, of gentleness, and love. There must be a renewal of the beautiful emotions of childhood, and a transfiguration of the spirit through repentance, pardon, and faith. This is Madame Guilbert's message in "Guibour."

The drama is one of a collection of forty Miracle Plays, all celebrating in some way the intervention of the Virgin Mary. Whether it is the work of one man or a

group of men is not known, for all the plays in the cycle of which it is a part were presented by the Puys, a confraternity of the fourteenth century, half ecclesiastical and half literary in its character. It is the only play of the group containing an example of a Mediæval Mass, and it sets forth with a very human appeal the creed of the Middle Ages, the idealization of the feminine virtues of chastity and fidelity, the indulgence of the Church, and lessons of forgiveness and faith.

To better comprehend the significance of the Miracle Play one must go back to the period that produced it. It is a product of the Mediæval Renaissance, which was most active in Normandy and the lower Loire valley, and in form and spirit is essentially a French creation. Beginning in the Church, which at that time stood for the art, literature, and social life of the people, as well as for their religious welfare, its evolutionary process was at first slow and obscure. In its earliest form it appears to have been the dramatic development of a legend setting forth the life or martyrdom of a saint. The first plays of which there is record are those of St. Nicholas and St. Catherine, which established the type.

The Saints at this time sustained a vital relation to the people, and the honoring of them was adapted to the spirit of the age. To possess the crown of martyrdom was, at this epoch of faith, the desire of the most simple and enthusiastic. The faithful each year celebrated the anniversaries of the Martyrs, and rejoiced in their new

birth in Christ. In turn arose the conception that martyrdom gave to the one who endured it a supernatural value. Toward the close of the eleventh century the Miracle Play had become an accepted institution in Central Europe, and one expression of the movement then just beginning, to free the drama from the Church.

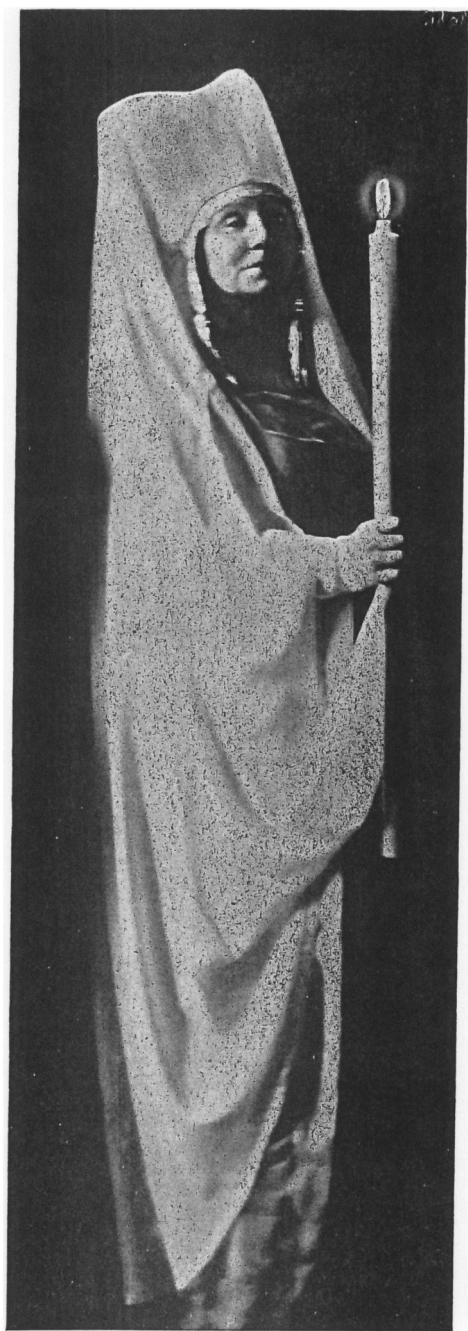
Although women have sometimes been accused by the critics of inability to retain the original feeling of an ancient play in a translation, Miss Anna Sprague MacDonald, who has done the English version of "Guibour," has succeeded in preserving a poetry and naïve simplicity of thought that are characteristic of the age, together with a mingling of superstition with actuality, a lack of logical sequence in development, and a rudimentary imperfection of dramatic form that link it with the youth of the race and the childhood of the arts.

The story is that of an episode in the life of a lady in northern France, and the action takes place in and about a public square, where are grouped the Church, the home, and the court of law, the three dominating institutions of that era. Guibour, who has led a blameless life, learns that her name has been coupled in a scandalous manner with that of her son-in-law. With a reasoning which may or may not be Mediæval, but at any rate is scarcely modern, she decides that only his death can re-establish her questioned reputation. There is a timely passing by of two murderers looking for employment, and she engages them for the deed, which is accomplished in her cellar. Before the burial, however, she confesses her guilt to exonerate her husband and daughter, who are under suspicion, and she is condemned to be burned at the stake. When the moment of execution arrives Guibour's garments refuse to ignite. In response to her

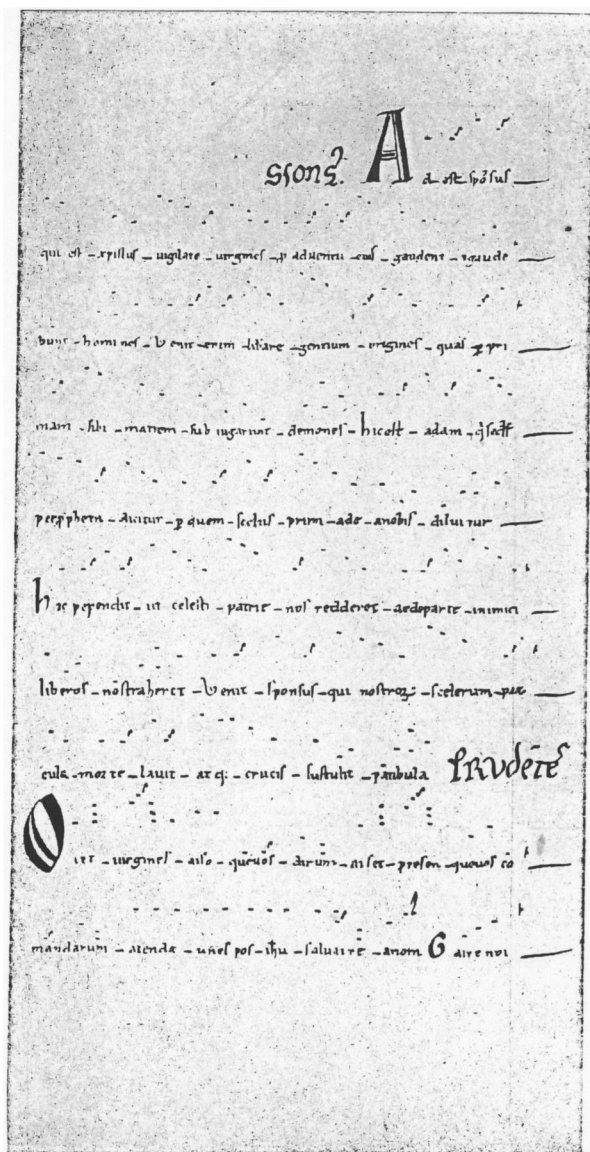
appeal to the Virgin for forgiveness and aid, the golden statue of Our Lady, with those of St. Gabriel, St. Michel, St. Jean, St. Raphael, and St. Uriel, come to life, and descend from their niches in the church to intercede for her, and the Voice of God is heard directing their efforts in her behalf. The people acclaim her as a Saint, and she is released.

Madame Guilbert as Guibour profits effectively by her study of Mediævalism, and is given abundant opportunity to display her capacity to commune with the great emotions. She has dramatic scenes when as a sumptuously dressed lady of the period she gives herself up to the accomplishment of the murder, and as a Saint at the stake; and her French accent lends to her excellent English both color and charm. There is a naïve touch in the complete disappearance of the doubly stricken father and daughter, who are abandoned at the climax of their anguish, and are in no way disposed of by the action of the drama. In the scenery and costumes, which are expressive of the tremendous luxury and ecstatic color of the Middle Ages, Mr. Robert Edmond Jones has achieved his greatest success since "The Dumb Wife," and by the exquisiteness of his art has done much to make the play an expression of the period. The music used was selected by Madame Guilbert from early chants and Mass music and contains a number of choruses older than the play itself. Others in the cast beside The Neighborhood Players were Rollo Peters, Margherita Sargent, and Wells Spalding.

The Neighborhood Playhouse, through the Festivals of Pentecost and Tabernacle, based on Hebrew traditions, and in the Buddhistic Japanese Noh, "Tamura," has already attempted to interpret the ritualistic drama of the East, and to this group "Guibour" has added the Festival



MADAME GUILBERT
AS GUIBOUR



SPONSUS

To which Guibour is brought to the stake

Music from the XI century

(Old notation on one line)

of French Life in the Middle Ages. As a part of the Henry Street Settlement, The Neighborhood Players are doing a quiet but effective work in guiding and cultivating the artistic taste of the masses of the East Side. Preparation for the Festivals includes lectures on the relation of art to the Drama; the life, costume, and design of the period portrayed, and on æsthetic appreciation. The amateur players are largely the students of the quarter, who give their only leisure moments to this interest, with tremendous sincerity.

Such artists as Miss Ellen Terry, the

Duncan dancers, and Miss Edith Wynne Matthison have appeared upon the stage from time to time before appreciative audiences made up chiefly of Russian Jews, though uptown visitors have discovered and patronize the Playhouse too. More than a hint of its significance in the life of the community was given by a childish figure, who, after the first performance of "Guibour," late in the evening, was seen swaying in and out with unconscious grace, among the ash cans of Grand Street, imitating for her own enjoyment the poses of Our Lady, and of the Saints who had come to life in the play.


SPONSUS: Transcribed from the XI century notation on one line, into that of the XIII century on four lines

(CHORUS.)



Ad-est spon-sus qui est Christus: vi-gi-la-te, vir-gi-nes. Pro ad-ven-tu e-jus gaudent et
gaude-buntho-mi-nes. Ve-nit e-nim li-be-ra-re gen-ti-um o-ri-gi-nes, Quas per pri-mam si-bi
matrem subju-garunt de-mo-nes. Hic est A-dam, qui se-cundus per prophe-tam di-citur. Per quem scelus
pri-mi A-dæ a no-bis di-lu-i-tur. Hic pe-pen-dit, ut cœ-les-ti pa-tri-æ nos red-de-ret, Ac
de-par-te i-ni-mi-ci li-be-ros nos tra-he-ret. Ve-nit spon-sus qui nos-tro-rum sce-le-rum
pi-a-cu-la Mor-te la-vit, at-que cru-cis, sus-tu-lit pa-ti-bu-la.

PRUDENTES.



Oi-el, vir-gi-nes, ai-so que vos di-rum; Ai-set pre-sen que vos co-man-da-rum.
At-ten-det un espos. Jhe-su sal-vai-re a nom. Gai-re noi dor-met. Ai-set es-pos que vos hor'al-